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# CHARACTER EDUCATION

Fact Sheet  
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## ***What is Character Education?***

Parents are children's primary moral educators. Character education helps schools support the home by fostering personal and civic virtues such as respect for self, empathy for others, a sense of self-discipline and responsibility, personal integrity, trust, fairness, courage, and love of learning. Character education is not a quick fix program, nor does it teach views on religion, politics, current events or other ideologically charged issues. The program helps young people be the best they can be by creating a school environment where civic virtues are taught, expected, modeled, celebrated, and continually practiced by both adults and students. The good character consistently modeled by teachers, principals, and other school staff members is among the most powerful means of developing good character in students.

## ***What are the benefits of Character Education?***

Character education has proven to be a positive force in reducing disruptive behavior, alcohol and drug abuse, and teen pregnancy. It reasserts the responsibility of schools, parents, and community members to be as concerned with the development of character as they are with the education of the intellect. Character education contributes to parental and community involvement, a safe and orderly school environment conducive to learning, reduced discipline problems, greater academic achievement, and high student-staff morale.

## ***Who decides what virtues will be taught?***

In collaboration with parents, teachers, and community leaders, each school will tailor character education to meet the unique needs of the school and local community. In general, character education will focus on the core ethical values which form the foundation of a democratic society: respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, caring, justice, fairness, and citizenship.

## ***How will children learn about character in school?***

A comprehensive approach is the most effective process for implementing character education. This approach infuses character education into all aspects of the curriculum and extracurricular activities with all stakeholders involved, keeping character education from becoming an add-on program. Schools may implement activities through their school improvement plans.

Some schools develop their own character education materials, depending on the needs and goals of the community. Character education can be a natural extension of multicultural activities, school advisory councils, and activities including students with special needs. Service learning opportunities assist students in developing responsibility, compassion, and maturity. Conflict resolution, peer mediation, peer tutoring, and mentoring activities also help students develop their character.

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***Are all school systems participating?***

Yes. In 1983 Maryland's Values Education Commission defined character and citizenship goals that Marylanders wanted to see fostered in schools. All 24 local school systems have been integrating character education into the curriculum. Training and technical assistance have been provided across the state. The programs currently being implemented throughout Maryland include a wide range of approaches to meet the needs of schools and local communities in their character building efforts.

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***How will the program be evaluated?***

An independent evaluation of character education programs in five local schools systems in Maryland was conducted from 1997 to 2002. The Maryland State Department of Education, local school system coordinators, and an outside evaluator and monitor developed an evaluation design that was multi-faceted. Data were collected on attendance, dropout rates, graduation rates, suspensions, office referrals, and school climate to help determine the program's success. In 2003, MSDE began an evaluation of three character education programs in Maryland to determine their effect on student achievement.

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***Is character education effective?***

Yes. The evaluation conducted in Maryland from 1997 to 2002 showed that school climates improved dramatically in the first year after character education was introduced, and the improvement continued through the subsequent years. Every school that participated in the character education initiative for all five years saw improvement in their school climate and saw their suspension rate drop by an average of 18 percent. Research in other states has shown that character education programs are associated with improved student behavior, school climate, and academic achievement.

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***Which character education programs are most effective?***

There is no best model for character education. What works well in a rural or suburban school does not necessarily work well in an inner-city school. Schools and communities need to have a high degree of independence and authority to develop a character education program that meets their own unique needs. Teachers and parents need to be invested in their school's character education program and should be involved in its design and implementation. Programs need to be institutionalized so that programs continue even when key staff members change.

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***Where can I get more information?***

For more information, contact the Character Education Specialist, Maryland State Department of Education, at 410-767-0957.